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Letter dated 7 September 2000 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to draw your attention again to the historic celebration in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem that began at Christmas 1999 and will conclude at Easter 2001. This event is being held in commemoration of the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and the dawning of the third millennium. This landmark millennial celebration has given all of us the opportunity to come to know and revere the history, beauty and sanctity of the city. It has also given us the genuine hope that peace, tranquillity and reconciliation would ultimately prevail in the Holy Land.

As you may recall, the Palestinian Authority, in 1997, launched the Bethlehem 2000 project, the purpose of which was to restore the many religious and historical sites in the city, as well as to rebuild Bethlehem's infrastructure and prepare the city for the millennial celebrations. The years of conflict in the region have made the task of rehabilitating Bethlehem an extremely challenging one. It became obvious that, to implement the project successfully and in a timely manner, broad and varied international assistance would be required.

In order to help the Palestinian people cope with this undertaking, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People took upon itself the task of promoting the project and raising international awareness of the project's needs. At the request of the Committee and in recognition of the universal significance of the project, the General Assembly included the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of its fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions, and adopted without a vote resolutions 53/27 and 54/22, respectively. In those resolutions, the Assembly, inter alia, expressed support for the Bethlehem 2000 project and called for increased assistance and engagement by the international community as a whole to ensure its success.

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Heeding the call of the General Assembly, as expressed in the above-mentioned resolutions, the Committee has consistently reserved a special place for the Bethlehem 2000 project in its various activities and in its meetings programme. The importance of heightening awareness of and promoting support for the project has been highlighted at the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held at Cairo on 20 and 21 June last. The Bureau of the Committee has also discussed this important issue with representatives of intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, as well as with non-governmental organizations.

In the course of the discussions held at the various intergovernmental meetings that I have attended over the year in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee, especially those organized by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity, and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, I have consistently promoted the Committee's objectives and activities, including its support for the Bethlehem 2000 project.

The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat continued to disseminate information about the project through the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), which can be accessed on the Internet through the United Nations home page or at domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF. Also, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/41, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat has established an Internet web site entitled "Bethlehem 2000", which can be found at un.org/Depts/dpi/bethlehem2000.

As a result of increased awareness and worldwide promotion of the project's objectives, substantial contributions have already been made by Member States and intergovernmental and civil society organizations. Nevertheless, a lot is yet to be accomplished within the remaining time-frame of the project, as well as in the months and years to come in the city of Bethlehem and in other Palestinian municipalities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian people will require considerable international assistance in order to deal successfully with the enormous rehabilitation and development tasks. Donor assistance, therefore, is vital for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people and for creating a viable Palestinian economy.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to all those Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations, and individuals that have so far contributed to the Bethlehem 2000 project of the Palestinian Authority and to the goal of reconstructing the city of Bethlehem.

In the light of the above and recognizing the importance of making a concerted effort aimed at completing the project, the Committee wishes to renew its appeal to the international community to continue to support and render assistance to the Bethlehem 2000 project of the Palestinian Authority and to the development of all other Palestinian municipalities. The Committee remains hopeful that pilgrims and tourists from every corner of the world will continue to visit Bethlehem — the birthplace of Jesus Christ — and celebrate the wealth of historical, religious and cultural traditions of the Palestinian people.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 36.

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People